

# FRIEDRICH WILHELM SCHALLMEYER:

## 1857-1919

A Pioneer in Eugenics

By MAJOR LEONARD DARWIN, Sc. D.

WHEN transmitting to the library of our *Society* a copy of the 1920 edition of Schallmeyer's work entitled "Vererbung und Auslese", I should like to be permitted to say a few words about it. He died in 1919, and neither that event nor the publication of the above-mentioned work was, I believe, noticed at the time in the *EUGENICS REVIEW*. This omission was doubtless due to the poverty of our *Society* at that time and to the post-war conditions then prevailing. As I was President at that time, I wish in some measure to make good the omission.

Schallmeyer was born at Mindeheim in 1857, being one of a large family, and his father was in business. He achieved distinction in the subjects at the Gymnasium at Augsburg and then began to study law. Soon afterwards he turned his attention to philosophy and then finally to medicine. In 1887 he became a general practitioner in a small Rhenish town, but before long came to feel that to help individuals at the expense of the community was incompatible with his conception of eugenics, which moreover deprived him of opportunities for research. After further studies of study he became a specialist in venereal diseases at Dusseldorf. He retired after seven years' work and spent the remainder of his life in research work near Bonn. Early in life he had visited Brazil, and when freed from duties he travelled in the Far East. He died in 1919.

Schallmeyer's short first work "Über die kulturelle körperliche Entartung der Kultur und die Verstaatlichung des niederen Standes" was published in 1891, and five years spent in trying to find a remedy. His main theme was that medical science, by preserving those of weak constitution, contributes to the deterioration of the race. He urged that attention should rather

be devoted to the control of the selective processes, this being based on researches in regard to heredity. He advocated the medical registration of all citizens and the state control of the medical profession. He was greatly influenced in his writings by the "Origin of Species," and he was at this time, like the author of that work, a believer in the inheritance of acquired characters, a belief he subsequently abandoned. His ideas were formed in the first instance before he had studied Galton's writings. Indeed it was his desire to study that author's works which led him to learn English, a task perhaps facilitated by his wide knowledge of other languages. He started his eugenic campaign in Germany uninfluenced by Galton.

Schallmeyer's second and more important work, "Vererbung und Auslese," was first published in 1903, it being written as an entry for a competition organized and financed by the famous Krupp. The subject of the competition was "Was lernen wir aus den Prinzipien der Deszendenztheorie in Beziehung auf die innerpolitische Entwicklung und Gesetzgebung der Staaten?" A prize of high value was offered and three scientists appointed as Judges. They awarded it to Schallmeyer's work in preference to those sent in by sixty other entrants. Several subsequent editions were issued, all carefully brought up to date, that of 1910 being already in the *Society's* library. The edition of 1920, forwarded herewith and published after his death, contains so many alterations as almost to amount to a new book, and is valuable as indicating the progress of eugenic thought in Germany. Schallmeyer's last years were, in fact, mainly occupied in an endeavour to popularize eugenics.

Schallmeyer's aim was, in fact, to prove that the qualities of human groups are prone to change as the result of an incessant

though imperceptible selective process. This arises because individuals are endowed with different hereditary dispositions and because they contribute unequally to the formation of subsequent generations. Favourable social conditions do not, he held, usually tend to promote racial progress; in fact they tend to endanger it by limiting the action of natural selection. Governments must influence racial processes both quantitatively and qualitatively and this can be done most effectively by propaganda. It is to be noted that Schallmeyer called the science he dealt with Rassehygiene not Rassenhygiene, and by it he meant the hygiene of the genotype.

Lest it should appear from the above that Schallmeyer's work was only known in Germany it may be mentioned that in Holmes's "Bibliography of Eugenics," published in 1924, there are twenty-three entries against his name, dating from 1891 to 1919. Again at the Eugenic Congress held in London in 1912, the most important eugenic meeting held in England up to that date, a

paper was read by Dr. Agnes Bluhm in which Schallmeyer was spoke of as "one of the leading spirits of the German eugenic movement" (See "Problems in Eugenics," p. 388). The main theme of his work was illustrated by indicating that "when through the skill of the obstetrician a mother with a much contracted pelvis brings a living child into the world" he thus "contributes towards the spread of" this trouble in coming generations (ibid. p. 390). I should like to see this paper reconsidered in the light of modern additions both to medical knowledge and to eugenics. It may be added here that Dr. Alfred Ploetz, who is now, I believe, been for a longer time a fighter in the eugenic field than any other living German, was welcomed in England on that occasion as a representative of his country. Which of these two pioneers had greater influence in changing German thought in the right direction it is not for a non-German to attempt to decide. Schallmeyer was anyhow first in the field.

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